

Student name: Melissa J Chiles

Student number: 1802340

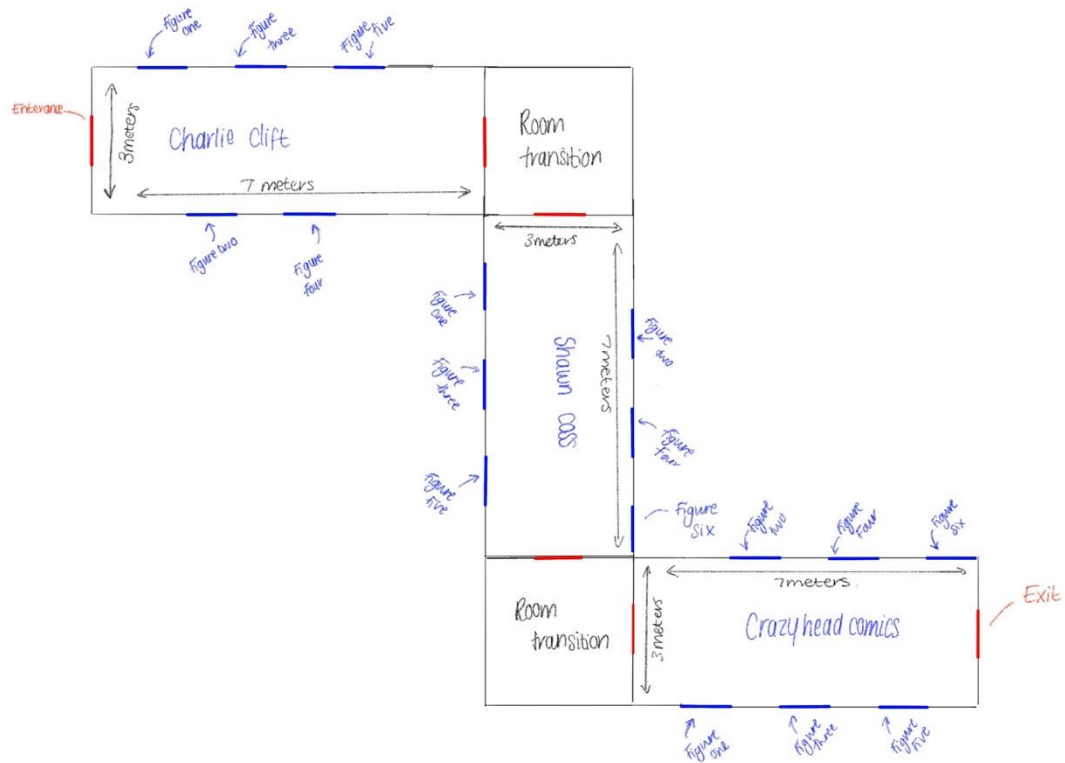
Course: BA Illustration

Tutors: John Pugh and Martin Bush

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Entitled 'unashamed' I intend to produce an exhibition that creates a conversation about mental health and mental illnesses so that people are more open minded and have a better understanding. The exhibition will feature three different artists with contrasting work to evoke different responses from the viewer. I intend to hold the exhibition in the centre of Cardiff so that it can be viewed by the general public. I have chosen pieces of work from a photographer and two illustrators that I think are relevant to my topic and support what I am trying to achieve.

I intend to give each artist their own 3 meters by 7 meters white room with a roof. I want to do this so that there is no distraction away from the artwork being exhibited. I hope that this will drown out some of the noise and distractions from the general public and other things. I have chosen Cardiff as I would like to focus on Wales (my home) before moving the exhibition to other locations. Cardiff is also the capital and is always very busy. Placing the exhibition in the centre would peak the interest of passers-by instead of being tucked away in a building and only attended by art lovers and supporters of the exhibition. I believe that flyers and word of mouth can only go so far. The aim of the exhibition is to start a conversation so the larger and more diverse the audience the better. In the best interest of encouraging people to attend the exhibition I would make it free entry but with the option to donate any amount to support a mental health charity in the local area.



I have chosen long thin rooms in this shape as I want it to be very condensed and a small space so that the viewer has no option but to look closely at the work to take it in. I chose this shape for the rooms as I want the viewer to feel as though they are going through a maze or are lost to get the full effect of the work. I also didn't want them to be able to see what is in the next room as there will be no doors, only a doorway into the next room. Keeping the rooms in a state line would mean they can see the artworks ahead.

I have chosen to focus on mental health as it is an important topic to me personally and a large amount of my work is focused on it. I want to start a conversation about our mental health and mental illnesses as often people feel ashamed of their mental state and refuse to talk about it until it is at a critical point or even too late. As a society we all strive for our best but a lot more of us struggle than many would believe. Being in a digital age where everyone posts their successes and good times on social media, you sometimes forget that nobody's life is perfect, and we are all struggling. By hiding the hard parts of our lives, we are doing a disservice to ourselves and those around us. It causes a lot of misunderstanding around mental illness as most of what we see about mental illness is in movies where they are often dramatized or demonise a person for their illnesses. As a result of this we see some mental illnesses as people we should fear or avoid at all costs. By being open to learning and discussing mental illness it will become more socially accepted and easier for those struggling to open about their struggles. I want others to know that it is important to do this even if it is not with your friends or family.

When looking into mental health support websites and programmes I came across Banyan mental health which states "The importance of talking about mental health cannot be overstressed. As a part of our mental health programs in South Florida, we work with patients that are all too often afraid to talk about their mental health disorders outside of treatment. Because of this, we want

people to understand the benefits of talking about mental health and encourage people to talk openly about mental health.” (*Banyan mental health* .01.08.2018) they say that “By talking about mental illness on a more regular basis, we as a society will hopefully unveil the false notions that plague this topic. When these myths are debunked, it should help remove the stigma surrounding mental health.” and “mental health is so taboo, too many people are not getting the treatment they need. In turn, their poor mental health could lead to suicide. One research study found that over 90% of people who commit suicide had symptoms of a mental health disorder.” which I think supports my reasoning for this exhibition. On the mental health foundation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland website it states that “If you are worried about someone it can be difficult to know what to do. When you are aware there is an issue, it is important not to wait. Waiting and hoping they will come to you for help might lose valuable time in getting them support. Talking to someone is often the first step to take when you know they are going through a hard time. This way you can find out what is troubling them and what you can do to help.” (mental health foundation. 2020) they also provide ways to approach doing this. I think it would be beneficial to hand out leaflets with this information as the viewers leave the exhibition, we would have already grabbed their attention and if they feel they need help they have an information pack right at their fingertips.

I decided to research into how talking openly and creating an environment where we can discuss issues in society, such as mental health, can really create societal change. I came across a book which tells individuals stories with mental health and how talking about mental health is no longer about helping yourself but about helping a movement against an invisible crisis (Gupta, A. 2019). It references an article by Paulo Freire that “argues that to create social change, oppressed people must have critical consciousness about their conditions, and that this consciousness is developed through dialogue. He theorizes that dialogue allows for reflection and unity building, tools needed to transform society.” (*Racial Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Critical Interracial Dialogue for Teachers of Color*, 10.02.2012) which shows that those of us who have experienced and are still experiencing mental illnesses, we need to open a discussion in order to create societal change and stop the stigma around mental health.

Room one

In the first room I will have work by photographer Charlie Clift and his project “let's talk”. Clift's description of the campaign; “Let's Talk is a campaign that aims to spark millions of conversations about mental health. By literally drawing people's most difficult thoughts on their faces, lettering artist Kate Forrester and I hope to inspire others to open up about their own mental health.” I think that the images are very powerful and even show celebrities which I think is important as we imagine them to have perfect lives due to their fame.



(clift figure 1)



(clift figure 2)



(clift figure 3)



(clift figure 4)

(clift figure 5)

I have chosen these images as they are inclusive of gender, race and sexuality as well as the lettering on their faces refers to different topics and includes well known people in the public eye. I think that including these in the first room of the exhibition will inform the viewer of the context and make them relate themselves to the exhibition through empathy and sympathy.

Room two

In the second room I will exhibit Shawn Coss' work about mental illnesses:



(coss Figure 1)



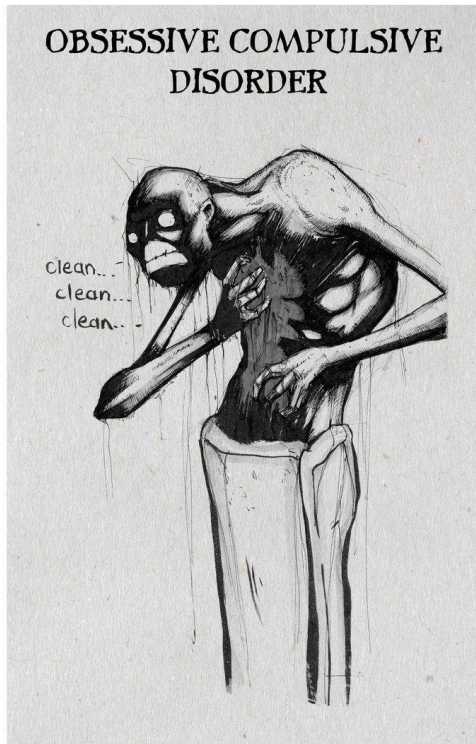
(coss figure 2)



(coss figure 3)



(coss figure 4)



(coss figure 5)



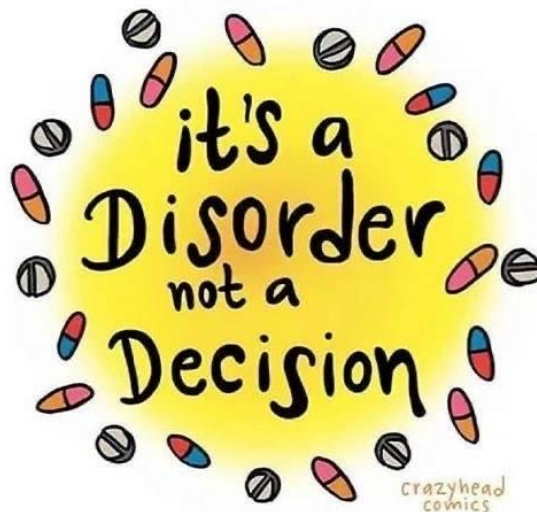
(coss figure 6)

I chose Shawn Coss as the second artist as I think that his work is shocking and really demonstrates the way that someone dealing with the illness really feels. I think that the shocking imagery will get people talking. I chose 6 so that the room would be very full and overwhelming to the viewer. I also chose illustrations that included some less well-known disorders and illnesses, things Capgras

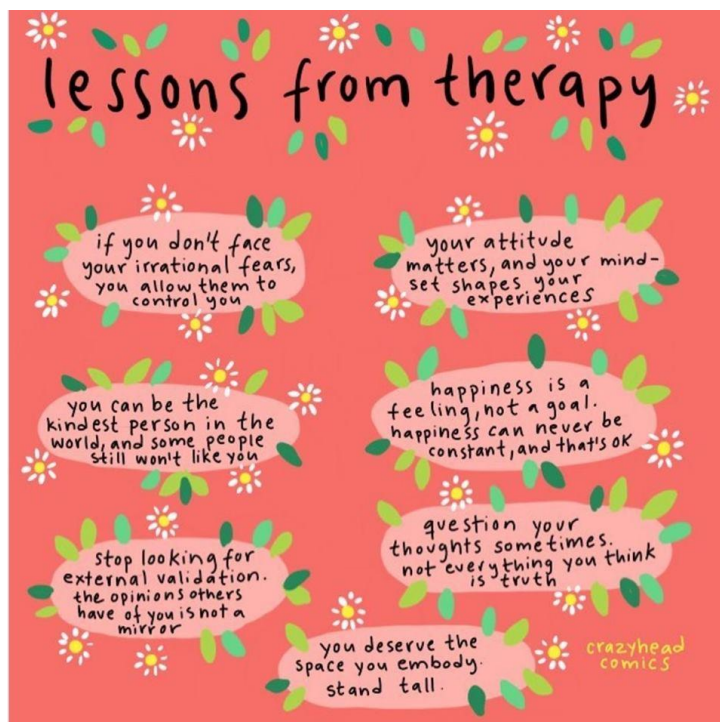
syndrome, Disinhibited social disengagement disorder and insomnia. I thought insomnia would be very informative as some people do not realise that it is a mental illness.

Room three

Lastly, to end the exhibition I chose Crazyheadcomics :



(crazyhead figure 1)



(crazyhead figure 2)



(crazyhead figure 3)



(crazyhead figure 4)

i want to talk about my mental health, but...

crazyheadcomics



(crazyhead figure 5)



(crazyhead figure 6)

I decided on Crazyheadcomics as I think it's a light-hearted way to end the exhibition with some informative pieces. I believe these illustrations are very encouraging and will push people experiencing difficulties to think about attending a therapist or talking to others. For example, figure 5 shows that everyone has things going on in their lives that they are scared to talk about no matter what it is so we shouldn't feel so intimidated speaking to others. Figure 4 also informs people who

may want to start a conversation with another person about mental illness the things that may not be deemed helpful, encouraging or could even be offensive.

Bibliography

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Clift figures 1,2,3,4,5;

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Coss figures 1,2,3,4,5,6

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Crazyheadcomics figures 1,2,3,4,5,6

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